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SPEECH

OF

HON. J. D. BRIGHT, OF INDIANA,

DELIVERED AT ALBANY, N. Y., JUNE 14, 1848.

[REPORTED FOR THE ARGUS.]

Mr. BRIGHT said:

FELLOW-DEMOCRATS: At this late hour of the night, I am not vain enough to believe that your call on me to address you proceeds from any ardent desire to hear me. I apprehend that it is intended as a mere compliment. [Vehe-ment cries of "No, no."] I am too well acquainted with human nature not to know, that when an audience has stood some four hours on their feet, listening to individuals so distinguished as those who have preceded me, they must necessarily be impatient to get away. [Renewed cries of "No, no."] To relieve you from any apprehension on this score, I will say, that my remarks will be very brief. Under different circumstances, it would afford me pleasure to address you at length. Not that I have the vanity to suppose I could add anything to what has been so well said on the great cardinal principles of Democratic truth by my friend from Ohio, (Mr. ALLEN;) but, if time permitted, I could enlarge somewhat on topics which he did not fully present. I dispense with all further preliminary remarks, except to say that I promise in advance, not to detain you later than 12 o'clock.

I regard it as unnecessary, fellow-democrats, in this era of 1848, to revert back to and discuss all the old issues that have been before the country for the last twenty years. Nevertheless, as a party—the great Democratic party of the Union, the party that has made principle its guiding polar star from the beginning—we should not lose sight of these issues. It is important to us as a party—it is not less important to the country—that we should keep our eye steadily fixed on the great principles on which we stand. For I hold it to be the duty of every man, (I care not what his political feelings and views may be,) when satisfied that he is wrong, to stand forth and acknowledge the fact, and change his position. The Democratic party, standing on its principles and measures, has nothing to fear, nay, everything to gain, from a fair and candid examination of both, and may well challenge scrutiny and investigation.

That the history of parties and politics for the last four years is in itself practical proof that Democratic principles and measures are right and conducive to the benefit of the masses of our people, no man, in my humble judgment, can deny. The issues that were before us in 1840, and again in 1844, have been practically illustrated, and carried into successful and highly beneficial operation, under a Democratic administration. I take, for instance, the bank issue, on which the Democratic party took the side of firm and strenuous opposition. The Whig party, as a party, as decidedly took ground in favor of it. The Democratic party proposed and advocated a substitute for a national bank, which was once termed by our opponents the "odious sub-treasury." This sub-treasury, gentlemen, has been in practical operation, under a Democratic

administration, for the last four years, and is admitted, by every man who understands its practical results, to be one of the most valuable and satisfactory reforms ever devised or carried out in the management of the fiscal affairs of Government. I venture the opinion that there is not one man in a hundred, even of the Whig party, who is thoroughly conversant with the action of the old United States Bank, and with that of the sub-treasury, (so called,) who will not concede that the latter is all that could be desired, if not all that had been claimed for it by its authors and supporters, or who, if he had now the power, would desire to exchange it for the old bank.

Passing on to the tariff, was there ever a case where the predictions of a party were so thoroughly refuted by results as those of the Whig party in relation to the operation of the tariff of '46? It was predicted, among other things, that that tariff, though designed to be a revenue tariff, would not yield eighteen millions of revenue. I refer you, in proof of this, to the speeches of leading Whig members of Congress. I refer you particularly to the speech of one of the most distinguished members of that party in the United States Senate, who rose in his place, just before the final vote was about to be taken, and pronounced a malediction on the bill, and on all who were about to vote for it—in the course of which, he uttered the memorable prediction "that it would not yield eighteen millions of annual revenue," and "that it would result in the commercial ruin of the entire country." But what has been the actual result? The tariff of '46 has yielded, the past year, over thirty-two millions of revenue, every dollar of which has been brought into the treasury under the operation of that law, not for the benefit of a few, but for the common benefit of all. And here let me remark, that if I understand anything about the tenets of the Democratic party, their fundamental policy is, so to frame the laws of the land as to benefit all alike, without reference to a privileged few. And whenever they cease, as a party, to advocate measures having only that object in view, they cease to be worthy of the name they bear, and under which we fight. There are other important matters which I might refer to, that I regard as settled. The Democratic National Convention lately met, and, in the name of the party, declared what they were for, and what they were against. They have said, We are in favor of the sub-treasury, and against a bank—in favor of a tariff for revenue, and against any system of taxation intended to benefit the few and prejudice the many. They have declared in favor of the extension of the area of freedom. They have declared their willingness to say to all, "Come among us, of every nation, kindred, and tongue, the oppressed nations of the Old World, here is room and enough for all; come under the benign sway of our laws and free institutions, and share with us, as citizens, the common inheritance which of right belongs to all." In a word, they have laid down a platform on which, as a party, we can stand and assert, with a confidence backed and sustained by the history of past results, that Democratic institutions give progress, prosperity, and honors to every citizen, whether the inmate of a mansion or the humble tenant of a cottage.

How instructive the lesson, and, withal, how impressive the commentary upon the value of the Government in which we live, to find the most venerated and ancient monarchies of the Old World, through force of popular moral sentiment, dethroning kings, abrogating oppressive edicts, and substituting, in lieu of both, the forms and principles of the model Government on earth! What American citizen, native born or adopted, that does not feel proud America is his home, and the political teachings of such patriarchs as Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson, the political chart by which he steers?

France, our old and beloved ally in the darkest hour of our revolutionary struggles, has, within a few weeks past, struck the chains and fetters of monarchy from around her, and proclaims to the world her devotion and attachment to democratic institutions. And Ireland, oppressed and injured Ireland—how long shall it be until she, seconded by the protecting hand of Him who “tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb,” shall proclaim her emancipation from the tyranny, injustice, and inequality that have so long been meted out to a population worthy and deserving a place with the more favored nations of earth? God grant, that before the birth of another year, Ireland and France may be free—free in the true “American sense of the term.”

A few words, now, in reference to the distinguished nominees of the Democracy. In presenting to the American people the names of LEWIS CASS and WILLIAM O. BUTLER, we have presented men who stand pledged to a certain set of measures; and the lives of each, in civil and military stations of great responsibility, are in themselves proof that they are worthy to be intrusted with the high offices to which they have been designated.

If it were possible, in this age of criticism, to have selected two individuals whose entire history, public and private, placed them beyond the reach of bitter party animadversion, then, indeed, have we been fortunate in the choice of our candidates. Uniting all those personal qualities that attach one good citizen to another, they embody, *each* within himself, all the elements of true, tried, and faithful Democrats; each has, at home and abroad, given evidence of his attachment to Democratic principles, and his willingness and ability to proclaim and maintain them. The records of our National Legislative Council bear full, ample, and unmistakable evidence of their sound republican views on most, if not all the great political questions that interest the country. With such men as these at the helm, the good old-fashioned Democratic party have nothing to fear, but everything to hope for.

But how is it with our adversaries—this “universal Whig party,” a party that is generally much more universal before an election than after it—have they nominated a *true* and *tried* Whig, either by practice or profession? (I say nothing of their nominee for Vice President; for of him I know nothing; except that he derives his principle notoriety from having been a violent Anti-Mason in the days of Morgan.) Can any one tell me whether Major General Zachary Taylor is a Whig, as Whigery is understood in this latter day and generation? However, this is a delicate point—one upon which *consistent* New York Whigs feel very sensitive, and I will not press it.

That the Whig party had aspirants for these high offices, embodying all the elements of Whig principles, no man can doubt; nor is it any more to be doubted that these men were anxious to be their standard-bearers. The man to whom that party owed most—the great leader of it—its founder and builder—so far departed from all precedent, that, a few months before the nomination was to be made, he came before the country in a letter, imploring, in effect, in the most piteous terms, that his party would give him one more and further trial; and that he whose locks had become whitened in services rendered to his party for the last thirty years, might not be thrust aside, in his old age, and forgotten. And well might Mr. Clay have pointed to those political warnings he gave his party in 1827, and cried, “Spare, oh! spare me, in the evening of a life spent in your service, the mortification of being superseded by a *military chieftain!*” In the year referred to, Mr. Clay denounced, in unmeasured terms, the effort then making to place General Jackson in the Presidential chair; notwithstanding General Jackson had then filled various stations of the highest grade, both in



the legislative and judicial departments of the country, and evinced powers of mind that subsequently proved he was, emphatically, *the* master-spirit of the age in which he lived. But Mr. Clay's objection to General Jackson was made without reference to his capacity for civil employment; it was predicated upon the ground that the liberty of people forming a government organized as ours is, was endangered by encouraging "a blind and heedless enthusiasm for mere military renown." As many of our Whig friends have very short memories, and as some of them desire to be as consistent as the nature of the very desperate case they have on hand will permit them to be, I will call their attention to an extract from one of the Imbodiment's speeches in 1827:

*Extract of a speech delivered in 1827, by Henry Clay, of Kentucky.*

"Regardless of all imputations, and proud of the opportunity of free and unrestrained intercourse with all my fellow-citizens, if it were physically possible, and compatible with my official duties, I would visit every State, go to every town and hamlet, address every man in the Union, and entreat them, by their love of country, by their love of liberty, for the sake of themselves and their posterity—in the name of their venerated ancestors, in the name of the human family, deeply interested in the fulfillment of the trust committed to their hands—by all the past glory we have won, by all that awaits us as a nation, if we are true and faithful in gratitude to Him who has hitherto so signally blessed us, to pause—solemnly pause—and contemplate the precipice which yawns before us. If, indeed, we have incurred the Divine displeasure; and if it be necessary to chastise this people with a rod of vengeance, I would humbly prostrate myself before Him, and implore Him, in His mercy, to visit our favored land with WAR, with PESTILENCE, with FAMINE, with any SCOURGE other than MILITARY RULE, or a blind and heedless enthusiasm for mere MILITARY RENOWN!!"

My Whig friends, while upon this branch of the subject, seeing, from the indications around me, that many of you want an excuse to bolt a nomination that threatens a dissolution of the Whig party, and is admitted by all *candid* Whigs to be a total abandonment of Whig principles, I will give you a further extract from the great *I am*, and I commend the latter part of it to the especial attention of a new kind of Whigs; and really you change titles so fast that it is difficult for me to keep the run of you. I refer not to Democratic Whigs! but Conscience Whigs!!

*Extract of Mr. Clay's speech at Lexington, Kentucky, June 20, 1827.*

"You were actuated by one of the noblest of virtues. I, too, acknowledge its sway. But whilst military merit is no disqualification, but, when accompanied by other requisite attainments, may be a reason for civil promotion—standing, as it appeared to me, alone, I did not think we could prudently intrust the Chief Magistracy of this great country to the distinguished object of your choice. I felt with you the obligations of national gratitude. But I thought they should be fulfilled in other forms. Let the public gratitude manifest itself in just and adequate rewards, drawn from the public treasure. Let inspired poets sing the praises of our military and naval commanders. Let the chisel and the pencil preserve their faithful images for the gratification of the present and future generations. Let the impartial historian faithfully record their deeds of glory and renown, for the admiration and the imitation of posterity. I say, too, in the language of a departed sage, 'honor to those who fill the measure of their country's glory.' But it should be appropriate, considerate honor—such as becomes its object, and such as freemen, jealous, cautious, and enlightened freemen, ought to bestow. If my suffrage is asked for the highest civil office of my country, the candidate, however illustrious and successful he may be, must present some other title than laurels, however gloriously gathered on the blood-stained field."

What "other title than military laurels" does General Taylor present? General Taylor says, in one of his many letters, "I am a Whig, though not an ultra one, by any means; nor have I ever exercised the privilege of voting; and I



'care not whether I am nominated by Whigs, Democrats, or Natives; but in being thus nominated, I must insist on the condition; and my position on this point is immutable, that I shall not be brought forward by them as the candidate of their party doctrines." Such language as this carries upon its face evidence that General Taylor was either ashamed or afraid to intermarry with Whigery alone, but, knowing that candidates were never selected by the Democratic party without the "whys and wherefores," he thought the chances a little better for Whig favor, and therefore he leaned just far enough over to catch the Whig breeze. No man knew better than General Taylor that the Whig party had been driven to the wall upon *all the old issues*, and it would require a large amount of bugles and cannon to resurrectionize them. General Taylor has certainly managed very adroitly, though I think the sequel will prove that he has written rather too many letters. In his letter of the 3d of August last to Mr. Ingersoll, he says: "At the last Presidential canvass, it was well known to all with whom I mixed—Whigs and Democrats, for I have no concealment in the matter—that I was decidedly in favor of Mr. Clay's election, and would now prefer seeing him in that office to any individual in the Union."

This letter gave hopes and confidence to Mr. Clay and his friends, and the next thing was, to ascertain whether the General would take the pledge under the conventional system. Accordingly, Mr. Baldwin, of Richmond, Virginia, on the 22d of April last, asked the General various questions. I give his reply to one of them: General Taylor says, "I do not design to withdraw my name if Mr. Clay should be the nominee of the Whig National Convention; and in this connection, I beg permission to remark, that the statements which have been so positively made in some of the northern prints, to the effect *that should Mr. Clay be the nominee of the Whig National Convention, I had stated I would not suffer my name to be used, are not correct, and have no foundation in any oral or written remark of mine.* It has not been my intention at any moment to change my position, or withdraw my name from the canvass, whoever may be the nominee of the National Convention, either of the Whig or Democratic party."

Thus we see, that as the dazzling glare of the Presidency seemed to approach nearer the eye of General Taylor, his ardent love of Mr. Clay was smothered; and, bidding defiance to all previous rules for the selection of candidates, he has most effectually driven the Whig party from their principles, and compelled them to find shelter under the humiliating argument, *availability*.

To those who intend to take General Taylor as Mr. Tyler was taken—*nolens volens*—I have nothing to say; to those, however, who support Whig men and measures, believing they are right, I desire to present one other extract from the letter of General Taylor, written to Mr. Delany, on the 7th of June, 1847. Mr. Delany asked General Taylor's views in reference "to a bank of the United States, and a protective tariff"—questions that have agitated this nation for the last forty years—questions that it is presumable every man of sound mind understands something about. General Taylor replies: "*I am not prepared to answer these questions; I could only do so after duly investigating those subjects, which I cannot now do, my whole time being fully occupied in attending to my proper official duties, which must not be neglected under any circumstances; and I must say to you, in substance, what I have said to others in regard to similar matters—that I am no politician.*"

In connection with the admissions of General Taylor, as made in the foregoing letter, I refer you to the extracts I have just read from Mr. Clay's speeches, in 1827, on military chieftains, and ask, whether it does not fit General Taylor's

case exactly? One of two propositions is evidently true: General Taylor is either entirely ignorant of all those principles of political economy that sustain and keep a great Government like ours in motion; or, understanding them, he repudiates the cardinal doctrines embraced by the Whig party, and while he is willing to receive their votes, he is unwilling, *and absolutely refuses*, to "be brought forward by them as the party candidate of their doctrines." In either case, he is unworthy the support of intelligent freemen; and while, under the rallying cry of party, he may receive the suffrages of a majority of those calling themselves Whigs, there is a very large and respectable portion of the *thinking, reasoning* men of that party, in every State in this Union, who value their principles and appreciate their reputation for consistency, that will never sacrifice one or both by sustaining him.

I here leave General Taylor, and his *peculiar* qualifications for the Presidency, to the tender care and keeping of that portion of the Whig party who have put Harry of the West on the political rack, and made a military chieftain his executioner. With what truth and propriety can this patriarch and pillar of the Whig temple exclaim, "Save, oh! save me from my friends!" From this day forward, sealed be the lips of the revilers of John Tyler; for while the sound of woe and lamentation at his alleged treason to the Whig party is yet ringing in our ears, we see the same, the *very same men* who joined in the general bewailment, engaged, and mainly instrumental, in presenting to the country a candidate of whom not a man in this audience—not a man in this State or out of it—can stand forth and say that he is committed to any one measure or set of measures, or, if elected, he will carry out any one of the fundamental principles by which the Whig party has heretofore professed to be governed.

Now, let us turn, for a moment, to the condition of things here. It is said there is division in the great State of New York, and that, therefore, the Democratic nominee cannot be elected. Admitting this division to exist, let me ask, how is that to benefit General Taylor? I do not propose to discuss the exciting question said to be the basis or pretext of division here, involving the rights of the States to make their own internal regulations; but if any portion of the citizens of New York seek what is called a "free-territory man," will they find him in the person of a man who works, every day, two hundred slaves? I apprehend the division in this State (if any does exist between Democrats) grows out of principle, and that no portion of the party that may be disaffected in consequence of their dread of the extension of slave territory, can select or go for a man who is himself among the largest slaveholders within the limits of the Union. But the Democratic party can't carry the State of New York, it is said. I will not believe that. I have done too much hard work for the Democracy of New York; I have seen too much hard work done by the poor and laboring Democracy of the great Western Valley, and for a candidate presented by and from the State of New York, to believe that any portion of the New York Democracy, when that great Western Valley, for the first time in the history of the Republic, presents their man, their undoubted favorite—a man who has grown up with the great West, and become identified with it in feeling, in interest, in sentiment—a man true to it and true to the country at all times—tried in many responsible and difficult trusts—their friend and fellow when that great West was yet a wilderness,—I say I am unwilling, under such circumstances, to lay at the door of any portion of the Democracy of New York the black and crying sin of ingratitude. We at the West have sustained your candidates; we have done for them as much as we could have done had they been from among us. And when, for the first time, we present our candidate, shall it be said that New

York, unfaithful to herself, influenced by local feelings, prejudices, or dissensions, turned her back upon us, and caused our glorious flag, that has so long floated in triumph over this Union, to trail ingloriously in the dust? [Loud cries of "No, no."] I never will believe it until I see it. If we had presented men unworthy of ourselves or of the support of our Democratic brethren of the Union, it would have presented a different case.

But who can say that Lewis Cass and William O. Butler are not eminently worthy of the highest honors which the Democracy of the Union and the country have to bestow upon any citizens? I know, that until the death of that distinguished man who was as much beloved and admired by his countrymen whilst living as he was universally lamented in death, and as sincerely from home as at home—I say, up to the hour of his decease, he was the choice, I was about to say, of a majority of the Democracy of the Western Valley for the Presidency. I can say he was my choice, and, had he been living, he would have had my vote as the candidate of my party. But Providence, in its wisdom, ordered otherwise. We were called upon to cast about for some other individual of the Democratic party that we considered worthy of the high trust to be confided in our candidate. And if that individual is not to be found in the person of Lewis Cass, of Michigan, I should be glad to have the Democrat here who is going to vote against him, come forward and name the man that he prefers to him. [A voice on the outside: "Martin Van Buren."] Well, (continued Mr. BRIGHT,) I have been a friend of Martin Van Buren. I voted for him in the Convention of '44, when others deserted him. He was then my model of a Democrat and an honest man; nor shall I pronounce adverse judgment on him, until further developments shall leave me no other alternative. I do not believe that he will lend his aid or countenance to any effort to defeat the candidates of the Democracy of the Union—one of them a man who lives my neighbor, within twelve miles of me: I know him well. I have seen General Butler travel and canvass in behalf of Martin Van Buren and that, too, when he would not have done it for himself. Tell me that Mr. Van Buren is about to sacrifice the hold he has on the regards of the great body of his party throughout the Union, by throwing his weight and influence against such a ticket! And would not, ought not, such a course to alienate the great body of his party from him? [Cries of "Yes, yes."] I was saying, that in 1844, Mr. Van Buren was my choice for the Presidency; but a majority of the Convention of that year declared that another individual should be the nominee. Is it not democratic to yield to the majority? Another individual was preferred by the assembled representatives of the Democracy of the nation; and we elected that individual; and I presume no man was more gratified at the result than Mr. Van Buren himself. It may be out of place for me to call names; but as Mr. Van Buren was named by some one in the crowd, I felt called upon to say that he was my model of a Democrat, until a few months past. I do not say now that he does not stand where he has always stood; but I do say, that he is the last man whose name his family, relatives, or friends should present again to the Democracy of the country. [Vehement cheers.] Offices and honors under the free institutions of America belong to the body of the people—not to any one name or family. [Tremendous and enthusiastic cheers.] It is the duty, nay, it should be the pride, of every Democrat, when he sees that his party prefers, or when they even intimate that they prefer another in his place, to step out of the way and make room. It is by adopting that course, and that only, that entire harmony and union can be preserved in party-organization, and the ascendancy of great principles secured and perpet-



uated. In most cases where I have seen the Democratic ascendancy weakened, it has been the result of a contest over the name of this or that individual—never of a contest on principle. It is our duty on this occasion, as Democrats, as party men, desiring the elevation of our principles and the prostration of their Federal enemies, to forget the past, to bury all internal dissensions, to fix our eyes solely on the triumph of the great cause of Democracy, and to march boldly and firmly on, one and all, to victory, without reference to troubles existing in the family at home. [Cheers long and loud.] I have no means of knowing what may be done in New York; but I will make a prediction as to the northwestern States, and I make one that will be verified by the result: We shall carry every solitary one of them! Beginning with Ohio, we shall sweep every State on that side of the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers. I make a prediction as to my own State; that, too, will be verified: We will carry it against the Whig nominee by 10,000 majority.

A few more words, fellow-democrats, and I am done. I have said thus much for the purpose of bearing my testimony to what I considered due to the great western Democracy. I have felt it my duty on this occasion, to say what we expect of New York, in return for that we have done for her son when presented to us as a candidate—the like aid we extended to her. [Cries of "We are with you."] I believe it. Never shall I forget the deep and anxious solicitude manifested the other side of the mountains in 1844, to hear from the Empire State. Every sister in the Confederacy had spoken to us but New York. It was known that our destinies as a party, for the time being, were in your hands. Well do I remember the congregated mass of beings on the banks of the Ohio, at the glorious little city I reside in, old and young, Whigs and Democrats—the honest yeomanry of the land. Many of them had travelled from adjacent counties, all anxiously awaiting the hour for the vessel to come that was to bring intelligence from New York—men that never held an office, that never expected to hold an office, or desired one. They were true, tried, old-fashioned Democrats, with hearts full of hope, and warmed only with a desire to see their principles triumphant, and to enjoy the practical blessings to themselves and their country, which they felt would continue to flow from such a triumph. Need I tell you, their hearts were gladdened by the result when it came, and the shout of joy rung from hill to valley? May we trust, when the conflict shall have ended in 1848, the same note of triumph will reach us in the West from the great State of New York? [Cries of "It will."] It was within the limits of New York that the light of Heaven first beamed upon my eye. I naturally feel no small degree of attachment to my native State, and her Democratic citizens. I have faith, and always have had, in the great body of the Democratic party of New York. It was here that I received my early impressions of the truth and value of Democratic principles. It was, I may say, from this State that the very State I now live in borrowed her political organization, which has done so much to concentrate the energies and build up the Democratic party of that State. I trust we shall see in New York, at the conclusion of this race, what we have seen and gloried in, in contests past and gone. If that should be the result, it would of course definitively settle the great question of the Presidency. But I make one more prediction: Let New York vote as she may, CASS and BUTLER will be elected, and by a triumphant vote. [Cries of "Good," "good," and loud cheering.]









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